



CREDIT: MAXIM BOLOTNIKOV

Trail rides are just one of the many activities available to families in and around Las Vegas. See article at right for more fun things to do.

Activities for Families in Las Vegas

We moved to Nevada when my children were very young. My impression of the state, like that of most people from elsewhere, was largely negative. When I thought of Nevada, I thought of casinos, gambling, and all of the adult activities for which the state has a reputation. I was dubious about raising a family here. Now, with my children grown, I have a completely different view of the state. Outside of the casino districts, we always found a wide array of family activities for our children, and yes—they even

attended birthday parties in casinos on occasion and had a very good time.

While I raised my family in Reno, my colleagues in Las Vegas can share similar thoughts on the great activities for families in Nevada. So for all those who approach a trip to Las Vegas with a measure of skepticism, I encourage you to visit us here in the west. We are anxious for others to come here and actually tell their friends about it, because contrary to

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Annual Meeting Registration Discount Deadline is March 10

www.aag.org/annualmeetings/2009

popular belief, we don't think everything that happens here needs to stay here.

Museums and Tours in Las Vegas

Considered by many to be the best children's museum in Las Vegas is **Leid Children's Discovery Museum**. The museum features hands-on exhibits in the arts, sciences, nature, music and humanities; a Traveling Exhibition Gallery; an Early Childhood Pavilion and an eight-story Science Tower with unique interactive exhibits for kids from toddler (little learners) to youth and adults alike to explore. Activities include Boulder Mountain where kids wear hard hats and run the mining equipment, Desert in the Dark where they learn about animals night activities, exhibits for babies still too young to walk where they can explore with their hands, eyes and ears, laser harps, wheelchair basketball and mechanics shops where all the tools area available for use.

The **Las Vegas Natural History Museum** is right across the street from the Lied Museum. In addition to sections on Nevada's native animals, an African gallery, a wildlife gallery and a dinosaur gallery, there are excellent hands-on

exhibits, handling areas with live snakes, and a gallery featuring marine life.

For something of a more local nature there is the **Atomic Testing Museum**, which tells the story of the development of the Nevada Test Site. The museum features first-person narratives, large iconic artifacts, environmental re-creations, theatrical devices, and interactive elements for personal exploration with multiple viewpoints of the nuclear program expressed in multimedia presentations and stunning graphics. The museum was created to document and interpret the unique history associated with over 50 years of nuclear weapons research and testing conducted at the Nevada Test Site (located just north of Las Vegas but closed to the public).

For a completely different twist on technology there is the **Pinball Hall of Fame**, a non-profit "working museum" covering 4,500 square feet and housing the world's largest collection of pinball machines, all restored to mint condition. Machines range from the 1950s to the 1990s and from 25 cents per play up to 50 cents for the newer ones. So bring a pocket full of quarters and play to your heart's content. Far more entertaining than an arcade in the casinos, and all profits go to non-denominational charities. Entrance

is free. See www.pinballmuseum.org for more information.

If you prefer something sweeter, attend one of the daily tours of the **Ethel M Chocolate Factory** and cactus garden in Henderson, a few miles south of Las Vegas. The best times to visit are during weekdays between 8:00am and 3:30pm when the chocolates are being manufactured. The factory tour wanders among the pipes, conveyer belts and tanks that hold between 20,000 and 35,000 gallons of chocolate. They are generous with free samples and the tour is free. While there you can stroll through the amazing cactus gardens. Why cactus? The owner simply likes them!

Outdoor Activities around Las Vegas

On the site of the original meadows that Las Vegas is named for (and only a short drive from the conference hotel) lies the **Springs Reserve**, a recently developed environmental education and interpretive center focused on sustainable living within the desert. This site will be visited by several AAG field trips, but for a family there are enough activities to spend the day.

Although the original springs dried up in due to lowering of the water table, the site has been restored with several acres